

Public Exchange Store (2007)

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<http://www.yotaiannidou.net/participatory-projects/public-exchange-store.html>



The Public Exchange Store as a multifunctional space of high socio-economic value added

The *Public Exchange Store* of goods and services is an experimental project that aims to deal with a number of contemporary issues of economic and social nature. In some countries like Argentina, Brazil and Malaysia, such activities are employed to provide solutions to purely economic impasses via the exchange of goods and other resources. Similar practices are now developed in Europe where the exchange of goods and services takes place, for example, through the internet and printed advertisements. In western societies, exchange concerns to a greater extent services, as wealth and consuming needs tend to be increasingly of immaterial nature.

Overall, the operation of Public Exchange Spaces can struggle against worrying phenomena that are observed in modern cities such as **over-consumerism**, **social isolation**, **long-term unemployment** as well as the reduction of **social capital** and **relations of solidarity**.



Some will argue that exchange is not a viable practice; however, such initiatives constantly seek for new horizons by promoting "social money". Social money can be understood as a way to overstep the mere satisfaction of the economic needs of the individuals who go on to exchange goods, by stimulating social solidarity and mutual understanding. In brief, social money strengthens and prolongs the relations which are developed through exchange. At the same time, social money allows attenuation of inequalities between mental and manual labor and also between skilled and unskilled labor, aiming to abolish injustices generated by markets. This is accomplished by estimating the value of the services and the goods on the basis of the time that is necessary for the production. In this way, individuals, for example the unemployed, who have more time to spare, immediately become "richer".

We can sum up some of the operations and the output of the PES on the community as follows:

Firstly, the PES, being a meeting point for social encounter, is an ideal context for the reconstruction and the reinforcement of solidarity bonds that are vital to the wellbeing of every community. More specifically, the PES is part of a broader initiative whose objective is to tackle phenomena such as the crisis of the **family institution**, the disintegration of "**neighborhoods**" and the shrinking of **welfare state**.

Secondly, in the context of the PES, the unemployed, whom the production system is unable to utilize, have the opportunity to offer their time and skills in exchange for goods or services. They can thus improve their **financial situation** (by accessing goods and services) and restore their sense of dignity and self-esteem in ways of creatively using their **knowledge and skills**.

Thirdly, products that are no longer in use can have a second chance to be useful to a new potential owner. For example: a musician who owns three guitars can exchange one of them and at the same time teach someone who:

- either wants to learn music but could not afford it or,
- was never indulged to (in this case, the PES functions as a place of **inspiration and discovery of new activities** which exceed the sphere of interests of its visitors).

The new guitar owner and student can in turn put his/her skills and knowledge in service to "pay back" the goods and services he/she received.

At the same time, the decision of exchanging needless goods can prove to be a good opportunity for citizens, in order for them to realize the low material and spiritual value of today's consumerist behaviors. Thus, a new approach is introduced

concerning the way a person relates to materiality and consequently to its natural environment.

Specifically, the exchange of goods enables the PES to become a part of **sustainable development**. In this case, the exchange enhances both **social welfare** (so far needless goods are being reused from new owners) and **environmental welfare** (natural resources such as energy, water and raw materials are preserved instead of being wasted to produce a similar good).

Finally, the PES presents many advantages as to (1) the satisfaction of purely economic needs that are interwoven with modern forms of poverty, unemployment and social injustice and (2) the restoration/reinforcement of solidarity and mutuality bonds and interrelations which form **social capital**. This specific form of social wealth seems to be increasingly important for every community that wishes to treat its members in equal terms. Therefore, the PES contributes to the reestablishment and enlargement of the *public space* at the local level -a space that transcends the individualistic and competitive behaviors that tend to prevail today- thanks to the formation of a new identity of citizenship based on solidarity.